

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

THE UNPRECEDENTED DECLINE OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The information and data used in the preparation of this report is from the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) made available by the California Department of Education Demographics Unit. For the purposes of this report, we are examining student participation (actual student enrollment figures), percentage of student involvement (which provides us with the “market share” for a subject area as a percentage of the overall student population), as well as the actual number of teachers. We are examining a five-year period from the 1999-2000 academic school year through the 2003-2004 academic school year. By this approach we are able to determine, using the actual California Department of Education CBEDS data, increases or decreases in student participation, overall student “share”, and increases or decreases in the teaching population in a subject area.

The results are stunning: Student participation in music courses, the overall percentage of students involved in music courses, and the number of teachers teaching music courses in California have declined dramatically over the past 5 years. The decline has been so significant that music education has suffered the greatest losses in percentage enrollment, actual student enrollment, and teachers than any other academic subject. These losses are clearly disproportionate to those in any other academic subject.

KEY FINDINGS

The dataⁱ in this report show that during the five-year period covering the 1999/2000 academic school year through the 2003/2004 academic school year that:

During the period when the total California public school student population increased by 5.8%, the percentage of all California public school students involved in music education courses declined by 50%. This decline is the largest of any academic subject area.

Actual student participation in music declined by 46.5% representing a loss 512,366 students. This decline is the largest of any academic subject area by a factor of four. (Physical Education is second with a decline of 125,000 students representing a drop of 5.2% of the total PE enrollment)

The number of music teachers declined by 26.7%. This represents an actual loss of 1,053 teachers.

Participation in General Music courses (those courses designed to bring basic music knowledge and skills to young students) declined by 85.8% with the loss of 264,821 students. This represents over half of the total decline of participation in all Music Courses. This is followed by declines in Other Music Courses (- 48.5%, -103,783 students), Chorus (36.1%, -57,905 students), Band (-20.5%, -44,509 students), and Instrumental Lessons (-41.4%, -39,792 students).

When student participation declines are compared to other academic subjects, Music tops the list. The decline in music participation (-46.5%, -512,388 students) leads all other areas including Physical Education (-5.24%, -125,156), Health (-12%, -31,660), Humanities (-37.5%, -25,622), Safety (-9.13%, -6,983), and Computer Education (-0.7%, -1,866). Art, Drama, Dance, Foreign Languages, Social Sciences, Science, Math and English all posted gains during the period.

POTENTIAL CAUSES

While additional research needs to be conducted to determine the actual causes, interviews conducted with educators and policy makers generated two recurring themes:

1: The implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, in particular the act's emphasis on testing the limited areas of reading, math, and (soon) science, has led to the decline in music programs. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as implemented has indeed been widely blamed for lessening of support for a variety of valuable school programs. Disturbed by this, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige has recently been moved to exhort school superintendents that "NCLB included the arts as a core academic subject because of their importance to a child's education".ⁱⁱ Based on the fact that the Secretary himself has observed problems with state and local implementation of the act, it is plausible to trace part of the erosion in California's school music programs to the process of implementation. The entire observed effect, however, cannot be traced to the NCLB. First, the idea of systematic student assessment did not arrive in California with the 2001 passage NCLB, but was implemented as a result of the California Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 (based on an "Academic Performance Index," and not specifically centered on status targets in a few subjects). Second, one would expect the effect of NCLB-mandated testing on the breadth of offerings in a school system to apply equally to all subjects not among the few chosen for testing. This is clearly not the case, as the data show that music programs have been limited in a manner vastly disproportionate to other curricula. At a minimum, therefore, other forces must be at work.

2. The well-documented budget crisis in California has led to the decline in music programs. The allocation of resources is certainly the central issue here, and "resources" in the context of education always includes the element of money (the other critical resource being time). Following logic similar to that applied to the effect of the No Child Left Behind Act, however, it is difficult to attribute the entire observed effect to budgetary woes. Nevertheless, it can be argued that many music programs in the state, most notably at the elementary level, were never reinstated to the vigor they enjoyed prior to the passage of Proposition 13 in 1979.

The situation has been compounded by the elimination of the position of Fine Arts Coordinator in many school districts which means there is no one to keep music “on the table” when budget constraints are discussed at the administrative/district level. Again, simple monetary shortfalls alone cannot account for the disproportionate effect on music programs.

These possible explanations are just that: possibilities. More work must be done to identify with more certainty the causes that underlie these declines. It is this need for additional exploration and examination of this issue that has led us to our first recommendation.

RECOMENDATIONS

Recommendation I – We urge the Governor, State Board of Education, Department of Education and/or the State Legislature to empanel a special taskforce to explore in detail the cause of this rapid decline of music education participation and present recommendations to reverse this trend for action by the state.

Recommendation II - We urge school districts to use resources available from the Federal Government to support the restoration of music programs. Specifically, monies in Title I, part A can be used by local education agencies to improve the educational achievement of disadvantaged students through the arts; Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants can address the professional development needs of teachers of the arts, and various funds under Title V are available for music education programs. (For detailed advice on this area, please see "No Subject Left Behind: A Guide to Arts Education - Opportunities in the 2001 NCLB Act at www.aep-arts.org/Funding.html.)

Recommendation III - We urge School Boards and Superintendents across the state to follow the guidance provided by Secretary of Education Rod Paige in his July 2004 letter to support music and arts instruction as part of the core curriculum of every child. Based on the contents of this letter, the No Child Left Behind Act should no longer be used as an excuse to reduce or eliminate instruction time in music and the arts in California Public Schools.

Recommendation IV - We urge local citizens to let their voices be heard. Local school boards must provide accurate student participation data for music and arts courses for both individual schools and school districts to the public each year. Individuals may access the current reported data for each school and school district from the California Department of Education. The website address is: <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>. Local citizens may access tools and information to support local advocacy efforts at <http://amc-music.org>.

Recommendation V – Learn from successful models. CMEA: The California Association for Music Education and the California Alliance for Arts Education have examples of schools and school districts that have robust music and arts education programs. These schools provide real world examples of how music education contributes to the overall success of these schools and the children in these communities. In addition, school districts should use the *California Framework for Visual and Performing Arts* to develop the appropriate, standards based, course work for students in music and the arts.

The trends identified in this data indicate that if steps are not taken immediately to reverse declining enrollment, music education courses in California's Public Schools will virtually disappear within a decade.

For more information or for a complete copy of the report visit the Music for All Foundation's website or contact:

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Excerpts from this report may be used freely with acknowledgement. Suggested reference: Music for All Foundation, 2004, *The Sound of Silence – The Unprecedented Decline of Music Education in California Public Schools*. Organizations may provide direct links to the full report at: <http://music-for-all.org/sos.html>

ⁱ The information and data used in the preparation of this report, unless otherwise noted, is from the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) made available by the California Department of Education Demographics Unit and obtained through Dataquest (<http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest>).

ⁱⁱ Excerpt from the July 2004 letter from U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige to the 16,000 public school superintendents in the United States.